

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1734

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY ATHENS

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY NICOSIA

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 7370

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, LE, SY

SUBJECT: CHAMOUN VISITS DAMASCUS

1. SUMMARY: NATIONAL LIBERAL LEADER AND KFOUR FRONT HARDLINER CAMILLE CHAMOUN HELD TALKS WITH SYRIAN LEADERS SEP 8 IN DAMASCUS. APPEARANCES AND STATEMENTS SUGGEST THAT CHAMOUN INDICATED HE IS WILLING TO GO ALONG WITH SYRIAN "POLITICAL STRATEGY" UNTIL SARKIS ASSUMPTION OF OFFICE SEP 23, KEEPING MILITARY OPTIONS OPEN IF THIS POLICY FAILS. ON OTHER ISSUES, CHAMOUN, LIKE PIERRE GEMAYEL WHO PRECEEDED HIM TO DAMASCUS TWO DAYS EARLIER, APPEARS IN CLOSE AGREEMENT WITH SYRIANS. NEXT FEW WEEKS MAY REVEAL CHAMOUN'S REAL ATTITUDE TOWARDS SARKIS AND HIS WILLINGNESS TO ACCEPT COMPROMISES FOR A BORDER POLITICAL SOLUTION IN LEBANON. END SUMMARY.

2. MARONITE "KFOUR FRONT" HARDLINER CAMILLE CHAMOUN VISITED DAMASCUS FOR FIRST TIME IN 22 YEARS SEP 8, VIA
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SYRIAN MILITARY HELICOPTER, FOR TALKS WITH SYRIAN

PRESIDENT ASSAD AND FOREIGN MINISTER KHADDAM. LARGE NATIONAL LIBERAL PARTY DELEGATION MET IN DAMASCUS BY PHALANGE PARTY MEMBERS WHO STAYED BEHIND AFTER VISIT BY PHALANGE LEADER PIERRE GEMAYEL SEP 6. DESPITE SOME EARLIER PRESS SPECULATION ON EXTENDED VISIT, CHAMOUN AND PARTY RETURNED TO JOUNIEH SAME DAY.

3. POLITICAL STRATEGY IN SUPPORT OF SARKIS.

PRELIMINARY REPORTS INDICATE MOST SIGNIFICANT RESULT OF MEETING WAS CHAMOUN'S AGREEMENT TO SYRIA'S PRESENT POLICY OF ATTEMPTING TO FIND POLITICAL SOLUTION IN LEBANON IN CONTEXT OF EXPECTED INVESTITURE OF PRESIDENT-ELECT SARKIS ON SEP 23. IF THIS EFFORT FAILS, SYRIANS (AND PRESUMABLY CHRISTIANS) WOULD RESORT TO RENEWED MILITARY PRESSURE THEREAFTER. POSSIBILITY OF MILITARY ACTION BEFORE SEP 23 WAS, HOWEVER, NOT ENTIRELY RULED OUT: L'ORIENT QUOTES "WELL-INFORMED SOURCE" TO EFFECT THAT CHRISTIANS AND SYRIANS MIGHT GO FOR "PARTIAL (MILITARY) ACTION" BEFORE SEP 20 IT SITUATION DOES NOT COOL OFF.

4. SYRIAN-LEBANESE INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS.

CHAMOUN DENIED THAT EITHER SYRIAN-JORDANIAN-LEBANESE CONFEDERATION OR BILATERAL SYRIAN-LEBANESE SECURITY TREATY WAS DISCUSSED. (BEIRUT PRESS SEP 9 CARRIES AFP DISPATCH FROM "WELL-INFORMED SOURCE" DENYING THAT ANY ASSAD-HUSSEIN-SARKIS MEETING PLANNED FOR SEP 18. RECENT REPORTS OF SUCH A MEETING HAVE FUELED CONFEDERATION SPECULATIONS.) CHAMOUN, HOWEVER, DID ALLUDE TO "CONSOLIDATION OF COOPERATIVE RELATIONS" IN COMING DAYS.

5. SYRIAN FORCES IN CHRISTIAN AREAS? WE UNDERSTAND FROM MEMBER OF CHAMOUN'S PARTY THAT CHAMOUN AND ASSAD DISCUSSED POSSIBILITY OF POSTING "SYMBOLIC" SYRIAN UNITS IN CHRISTIAN-HELD AREAS OF LEBANON, SHOULD RECOURSE TO MILITARY MEANS AFTER SEP 23 BE NECESSARY. COMMENT: IDEA MOST LIKELY WOULD BE TO underscore SYRIAN CLAIMS THAT THEY IN LEBANON AS PEACE-KEEPING FORCE RATHER THAN TO SUPPORT ONE SIDE. END COMMENT.

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6. SYRIAN MILITARY WITHDRAWAL. CHAMOUN SAID THAT SYRIAN TROOPS IN LEBANON WOULD REMAIN "AS LONG AS WANTED BY THE LEGAL LEBANESE AUTHORITIES AND WILL WITHDRAW AT FIRST REQUEST FOR LEBANESE GOVERNMENT."

7. SARKIS INVESTITURE. SYRIANS PREFER CHTAURA, IN SYRIAN-OCCUPIED LEBANON, BECAUSE OF SECURITY SITUATION IN BEIRUT. CHAMOUN POINTED OUT THAT CONSTITUTION CALLS

FOR PARLIAMENT TO MEET IN BEIRUT. KHADDAM REJOINED THAT PRECEDENT (IN FRANCE 1940) EXISTS FOR SESSIONS OF PARLIAMENT OUTSIDE OF CAPITAL CITY.

8. OTHER ISSUES. BEIRUT PRESS REPORTS FOLLOWING ADDITIONAL SUBJECTS ALSO DISCUSSED: SYRIAN/LEBANESE BORDER CONTROLS; SITUATION IN SOUTH LEBANON; PRESENT LEBANESE GOVERNMENT (SYRIANS OPPOSE REMOVAL OF PRIMIN KARAME); NEW LEBANESE AARMY COMMAND (CHAMOUN TOOK NO POSITION); RESULTS OF COLOMBO AND CAIRO CONFERENCES; AND AL PEACE PLAN (SYRIANS REPORTEDLY SAID IT WAS NOT SERIOUS AND HAD NO CHANCE OF SUCCESS).

9. COMMENT: ONE PRESS ACCOUNT IN BEIRUT SAYS THAT, AS RESULT OF VISIT, SYRIAN LEADERSHIP NOW REGARDS CHAMOUN AS A "MODERATE," SUGGESTING THAT CHAMOUN TAILED HIS REMARKS TO PLEASE HIS AUDIENCE. HIS ACTIONS AND THOSE OF HIS MILITARY FOLLOWERS ON THE STREETS OF BEIRUT AND OTHER BATTLEFIELDS OVER NEXT TWO WEEKS WILL MORE CLEARLY REVEAL HIS TRUE WILLINGNESS TO JOIN IN THE SEARCH FOR A VIABLE POLITICAL COMPROMISE SOLUTION.

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